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TAGS: PREL PHUM ZI BC

SUBJECT: BOTSWANA: READ-OUT FROM MFA ON SADC SUMMIT

REF: GABORONE 70

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen J. Nolan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Samuel Otlule, the Permanent Secretary at Botswana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that the Communiqué issued by SADC at the close of the January 26 Extraordinary Summit on Zimbabwe was a "consensus document" and was supported by Botswana. Otlule characterized the summit as "very intense" and said that the communiqué represents a "best deal" under present circumstances for the MDC. SADC's timeline for formation of the unity government breaks the current impasse and opens the door to more constructive dialogue in future. According to Otlule, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai accepted the SADC plan, but he still must obtain the endorsement of the MDC's National Council, which is not a given. Botswana encouraged the MDC to join the unity government in Zimbabwe because the GOB believes that once in government the MDC will be better placed to shape and influence outcomes. President Khama will brief Ambassador Nolan and a select group of Chiefs of Mission on January 29, and we will report septel Khama's insights on the summit and on the way ahead. END SUMMARY.

Dynamics of the Summit

¶2. (C) Ambassador Nolan phoned Samuel Otlule, the Permanent Secretary at Botswana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs late on January 27 to seek a read-out from the GOB on the SADC Extraordinary Summit on Zimbabwe that took place in Pretoria January 26-27. According to Otlule, the communiqué issued by SADC after the summit does represent a consensus view and it was supported by Botswana. He characterized the summit as "very intense" and told the Ambassador that President Khama worked hard and applied strong pressure to ensure that the communiqué reflected the concerns of both Botswana and the MDC. Botswana, Tanzania, and Lesotho were the only SADC members in the MDC's corner at the summit. Other SADC members present remained largely silent throughout, Otlule remarked. The Heads of State and former President Mbeki met in closed session much of the time, excluding even their ministers, while they worked out the key points.

¶3. (C) President Khama tried throughout the negotiations to keep the focus on the MDC's five key issues, as outlined in Tsvangirai statement. These conditions include a) enacting constitutional amendment 19; b) legislation regarding the National Security Council; c) equitable allocation of

ministerial portfolios; d) appointment of provincial governors; and e) how to handle breaches of the agreement. Though the GOB understands that the January 27 SADC proposal is less than ideal, according to Otlule it represents a "best deal" for the MDC under present circumstances, one that breaks the impasse and at least opens the door to more constructive dialogue in future. Botswana felt the MDC would have more influence working on these key issues from within a unity government rather than continuing to bang on the door from outside. In particular, regarding the question of guarantees to hold the parties to account, the GOB believes that the summit wasn't the right place to negotiate such details. Otlule said that ZANU-PF acknowledged that issues regarding accountability must be addressed quickly. The GOB was also concerned with a perception amongst some SADC members that the MDC has been the main "spoiler," preventing any forward movement on implementation of the unity government. Botswana wanted to avoid having the MDC or the GOB blamed for the failure of the negotiation process.

Unity Government: Next Steps?

¶4. (C) Permanent Secretary Otlule said that Tsvangirai "accepted" the deal outlined in the communique, but noted that Tsvangirai still must obtain the endorsement of the MDC's National Council, which is not a given. Otlule commented that Tsvangirai should closely examine the decision making process within the MDC. According to Otlule, Tsvangirai's lack of authority and subsequent second-guessing by the MDC National Committee is a weakness and hasn't helped the MDC in negotiations. Though MDC National Committee

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approval is still pending, Botswana hopes the MDC will join the unity government, and wants them to consider how they can make best use of this opening. It will not be easy, but the GOB believes that the MDC will be better placed in government to shape and influence outcomes. If there is lack of good faith on the part of ZANU-PF and the issues ultimately cannot be resolved, then the deal will dissolve in a few months and Zimbabwe will have to go back to the ballot box.

Comment

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Though the Perm Sec's read-out was useful, it is clear from his account that the key negotiations took place with only SADC Heads of State and Former President Mbeki in the room. Therefore, we look forward to hearing from President Khama himself to better understand the summit dynamics and Botswana's views on the way ahead. The President has invited our Ambassador and a few other Chiefs of Mission to a debrief on January 29, and we look forward to reporting septel on that meeting. Post respectfully requests that Washington send us any specific points they wish to have raised with President Khama as soon as possible.

¶6. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Though Otlule says that Khama worked hard to ensure the MDC got a fair deal at the summit, it is hard to see what was achieved. Indeed, other than the timeline and the suggestion to take a look at the division of ministerial portfolios in six months, the January 27 communique is remarkably similar to SADC's proposal from November 2008. The MDC did not win control of the Home Affairs Ministry or any other noticeable concessions. What seems to have shifted is the GOB's stance. If Otlule's read-out is accurate, the GOB would appear to believe that getting the MDC into government is the best way to break the impasse and put pressure on Mugabe to honor the agreement. Perhaps the GOB has accepted that SADC will not budge, and the AU will continue to defer to SADC, so MDC entry into even a bad deal may be the only way to create forward movement.
END COMMENT.

NOLAN